

[Domestic Workers' Union]

Beliefs and Customs - Folk Stuff

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK 11 Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Vivian Morris

ADDRESS 225 West 130th Street, N.Y.C.

DATE February 2, 1939

SUBJECT Domestic Workers

1. Date and time of interview
2. Place of interview
3. Name and address of informant Rose Reed 318 West 119th Street New York City
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

FOLKLORE

Library of Congress

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Vivian Morris

ADDRESS 225 West 130th Street, N.Y.C.

DATE February 2, 1939

SUBJECT Domestic Workers

Having talked to and wheedled out the stories of rebellion and tirades of hate from the habitues of the various slave marts, I came to the conclusion that this was a one sided, and not a true cross section of the domestic affairs. So I decided to take a subway to the Kingsbridge Road section of the Bronx, and interview some of the domestics who would be mending their ways homeward, after their days work.

I walked down Kingsbridge Road and attempted to halt two women who appeared to be domestic workers but they were in too much of a hurry to be bothered. One mumbled something about having to hurry home and cook and the other just plain just plain/ ignored me.

The third lady whom I attempted to interview, a kindly middle aged woman of about forty, didn't have to cook and didn't ignore me. She remarked that she had not seen me before and that I must be new on the job. I agreed and as we entered the subway turnstiles we were chatting aimably.

Her name was Rose Reed, and in a soft spoken uncongealed manner she opened the door to her feelings on the domestic workers situation. Rose said that there could be much

Library of Congress

improvement in the pay and working 2 conditions of the domestics, but she got a fair salary and the conditions under which she worked were not as bad as the majority of her fellow workers found them. She was on the job eight hours a day, and took one of these for lunch. She was paid three fifty per day and carfare.

This was a startling revelation to me, after the fifteen and twenty cent per hour scale of the women who frequented the slave marts. I asked Rose if she were happy. She said no because she knew too many other instances in which her sisters were exploited and worked like oxen because they did not understand how to better conditions.

I looked puzzled at this assertion, and she went on to explain; "there was a time when I worked for low wages, the same as many other women who are employed as household servants." But while my back was almost breaking from the work, my heart was light and as I sang "I Got to Get Rid of this Heavy Load," or "Go Down Moses," I searched my brain for some salvation from that awful work. I wanted to get rid of that heavy load, but I didn't know where to begin.

Then one Sunday I was sitting next to a sister in church and I told her how hard I had been working. She showed me the way out. She said she was working for some good people who paid her well and treated her so nice that she asked her if she was a member of the Domestic Workers Union. She told them she did not know of such a union, and let it drop at that. A few days later her employeer gave her the address of the Union and urged her to join. Finally she said she would join to keep the madam from asking her about it again, and she not knowing anything about. This was one of the best things she ever did in her whole life she said.

I asked her for the address of this place and she gave it to 3 me. I joined the union and, do you know I got plenty of work. Conditions and wages were so good I hardly believed it.

Library of Congress

"I've been a member of the union for nearly six years now, honey," she proudly patted her union book, then passed it over to me. "Are you in the union?" Rose shot at me.

"No-no," I answered in a flustered tone.

"Well I think the best thing that you could do would be to join up," she sagely confided.

"You can't fight your battles alone."

The woman was actually trying to recruit me.

"What are you doing tomorrow around twelve - working?" she asked kindly.

"No, I'm off tomorrow."

"Good. Stop past my house and I will take you to the union hall. You don't have to join. Just see the spirit and the great work going on there. I live at 316 West 119th Street. Will you be there?" she asked anxiously.

Bewildered and thunderstruck by this now slant on the domestic situation and finding out that some domestics were clutching at and holding tenaciously to the solution to their exploitation enigma, I consented to visit the hall and find out the functions of the Domestic Workers' Union.